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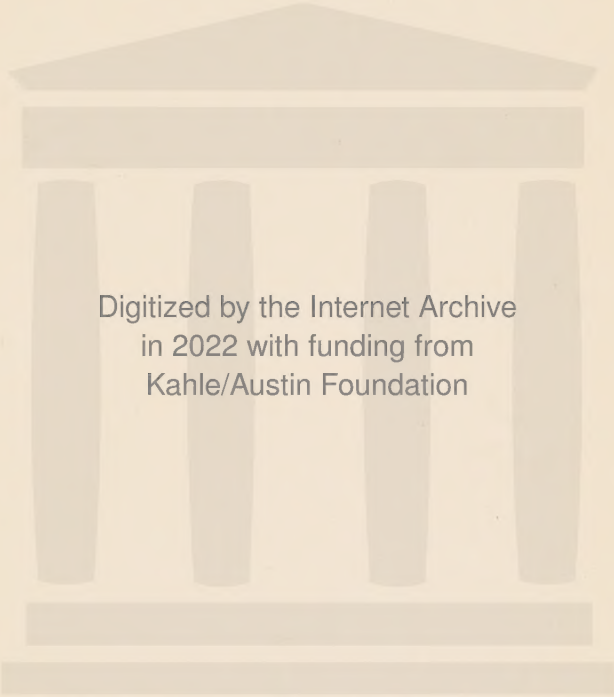
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EARTH



ACT II "DE TIME AM COME!"

EARTH

A Play in Seven Scenes

BY

EM JO BASSHE

Author of "Adam Solitaire"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ERIC WALROND



A New Playwrights' Theatre Production

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

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EM JO BASSHE

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First produced by the New Playwrights Theatre in their
52nd Street Theatre February 9, 1927. Later moved to the
Grove Street Theatre.

EARTH

By EM JO BASSHE

Directed by EARL BROWNE

CAST

Deborah.....	<i>Inez Clough</i>
Brother Elijah.....	<i>Daniel L. Haynes</i>
Abner.....	<i>Hayes Pryor</i>
Senon.....	<i>William Townsend</i>
Mary.....	<i>Marie Young</i>
Sera.....	<i>Ruth Carr</i>
Dinah.....	<i>Dannie Morgan</i>
Naomi.....	<i>Elsie Winslow</i>
Suzanna.....	<i>Geraldine Evans</i>
Barnabas.....	<i>Hemsley Winfield</i>
Moses.....	<i>H. Webster Elkins</i>
Matthias.....	<i>Jerome N. Addison</i>
Ebenezer.....	<i>McKinley Reeves</i>
Peter.....	<i>Harold DesVerney</i>

SCENES

SCENE 1: A clearing in a thick forest.

SCENE 2: Interior.

SCENE 3: Same as Scene 2.

SCENE 4: A mountain.

SCENE 5: Same as preceding Scene.

SCENE 6: The same.

SCENE 7: Same as Scene 2.

Stage Managers

RUSSELL WRIGHT AND HEMSLEY WINFIELD

Scenery designed by CLEON THROCKMORTON

Music composed by HALL JOHNSON

Costumes by EVELYN T. CLIFTON

INTRODUCTION

I was ready to affirm, without an instant's trepidation, that, next to Rose McClendon, she was quite the most sensitive—certainly the most vivid and talented—feminine personality in the Negro theatre.

I seized the opportunity at once.

"Did you," I enquired, "did you get a chance to see 'Earth'?" Unfortunately I happened to be out of the country at the time the play was given by the New Playwrights Theatre at the 52nd Street Theatre last Spring.

"Yes, I did."

"What was it like?" I pursued eagerly.

"Oh, just like earth—earthy."

I was momentarily bewildered—but I quickly gathered my senses together again. Light poured in upon me eventually. The point of view, I reasoned, taking into account the insidious influence exercised upon art by the social fetishes of the time, was far from being inconsistent. In fact I think it was quite logically consistent.

The history of "Earth," right enough, begins in Boston. There Mr. Basshe, who was born in Russia, "cubbed" on the "Globe" and the "Journal," since defunct. There he rubbed elbows—a primary experience—with the plaintive souls of the Negro ghetto on Tremont Street. This was some years ago. Even at that time the heterogenous composition of "Young Africa in the Hub" was a violent one: sullen expatriates from the cotton belts and sugar mills of Georgia and Alabama; ebony Britons from umbrageous tropic isles in the Carib Sea; un-race-conscious Negroes of Portuguese origin from the Cape Verde Coast.

Once kindled, Mr. Basshe's interest in the Negroes persisted. It led him, the winter of 1921, to Harlem—then but a budding chrysalis.

He found himself in a drug store on Lenox Avenue filling prescriptions for Negroes. Part of the compensation of this sombre task was the opportunity it gave the playwright to touch, no matter how remotely, the lives of the brown, black and yellow folk herded up there.

One day a trembling old lady came in with a prescription from a local Negro physician. She was, to employ the patois of the social case workers, a "newcomer." She had once headed a questing van

North. From the banks of some jungled bayou in Louisiana she had come, wild with dreams of life and fortune. From some hovel in Dixie she had come, she and her two dusky working sons.

There were none of the stock mammy exteriors about this woman. Her head was not wrapped in a scarlet rag, nor was her skirt caught up and fluffed out, from just below her hips, by a sash of dried cane trash. The old lady was tall and upright and nervously put together.

The yearning little household had come up in December. By the middle of January one of the boys—he who had come to know the resounding roll of a wheelbarrow on the frigid North River docks—was gone, eaten up by the black source of pneumonia.

Another month passed. The winter was dark and trying. Outside the wind howled and moaned, snow covered the sidewalks, and the shadows of passing Negroes hurried on.

Never was the sun so remote from the equatorial skies of Harlem.

In February the old lady came back in again . . . again with a slip of paper. "Hurry, doc!" she said, handing it to the druggist. She paced the floor frantically.

And a shadow crossed the druggist's face.

The old lady murmured audibly, "I'm gwine fights 'em off! I'm gwine beat 'em at their own game! I fights, fights, fights——"

But a dose of chronic pneumonia was more powerful than any Negroes' sorcery, and the boy went shuffling off the equator. . . .

In addition to giving Mr. Basshe the idea for "Earth," this incident strengthened him in the belief that superstition among Negroes of a certain class was a thing which existed and which exercised a vital influence upon the course of their everyday lives. But that it determined the peculiar religious experience of the broad mass of black folk was an issue upon which Mr. Basshe felt he needed more than arbitrary conviction.

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Meanwhile a Negro zealot from a rostrum in a basement on 135th Street was addressing a tight packed throng of Negroes. The man was broad and black, thick and squat. His face steamed drops of ink and his voice filled the low crammed cellar. He had derived from some scalding isle in the West Indies and he was bellowing forth panaceas for Africa's disenchanting millions.

"When you hear a white man speak of God, do

you think he means the same color God you Negroes say you are praying to? No, my friends. When a white man prays he prays to a white God, don't you kid yourselves about that. If God is made in man's image, how do you know this God you Negroes worship ain't made in the image of the American white man? How you know he ain't made in the image of those 'crackers' down in Georgia? Here you go worshipping a God that Vardaman and Cole Blease might be praying to this very night. Answer me this question: Do you think the God that rules over Vardaman and Cole Blease is the same God that rules over the destinies of black folk?"

"No, no!"

"How do you know this God you're praying to don't believe in keeping niggers in their place? Suppose, Sister Jane, when you go up to gates of Heaven St. Peter should send you 'round to the entrance marked for 'colored?' What can you do about it, egh? Suppose, Mistah Colored Man, when you start through the golden gates of Heaven St. Peter should stop you and say to you, 'Can't you read, Mistah Shine? Don't you see the sign, "No dogs or niggers allowed"'? Now what are you going to say to that, egh? You think you can break in the white man's heaven? You think the white man gwine

let you break in his heaven? If you can't break in his schools and colleges, his restaurants and his churches down here, how you expect you gwine be able to break in God's starry white heaven with all His holy white angels lying about? I tell you something, if you Negroes don't go and get yourselves a heaven, a good big black heaven, if you Negroes don't get yourselves a God, MADE IN YOUR OWN IMAGE, if you Negroes don't get yourselves a REAL DARK MAN OF SORROWS, you are going to be a po' lot of folks when the Great Day come."

.

Mr. Basshe, in his quest for corroborative evidence, invaded the agrarian "black belts" of the South. He spent six months trooping about Virginia, Georgia, Kentucky and Florida. He bunked and swapped yarns with the simple farming folk of these regions. He remembers staying with an old couple—both were somewhere between ninety and ninety-five—down in Georgia. "I can feel God walkin' all round here," the old man would say at dusk, out there on the stoop.

I was especially gratified to see Mr. Basshe focusing his dramatic lens upon an era as reminiscent as the days immediately succeeding the Civil War. With his material he might have done something

much more immediate and ephemeral, but he very wisely refrained. He dug in the past and came up dripping with virgin ore.

I arose from a reading of "Earth" with the feeling of having made honest and authentic contact with a diminishing phase of primitive Negro existence. Mr. Basshe's play is a work of chiselled lyric beauty and one which adds vitally to the meagre store of dramatic writing involving the primary folk-experiences of the American Negro.

ERIC WALBOND.

New York, June, 1927.

NOTE

The characters in this play,—ranging from 40 to 60 years of age,—constitute, with their children, the whole community and are all negroes.

Period of Play: About 1880.

Season: Spring.

The first scene takes place in the evening, and from then on the action is continuous until the end of the play.

SCENE ONE

A clearing in a thick forest, the center of which is a hut obscured by branches and wild shrubbery. It is very dim as the moonlight hasn't yet crept through the thick foliage. Only the outlines of the trees and hut can be discerned. Various birds are croaking and birring.

Voices from L.

BARNABAS

[In a loud whisper.]

Bettah don go too nea, Eben—stay back, ah tells yo!

EBENEZER

Shoot from hea—

MATTHIAS

Dat good sense!

PETER

No—dem trees stop any bullet—look dat thick-ness!

MOSES

Sho right.

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Very old, blind, tall; straggly in his movements.*]

Too loud yo is—keep quiet ah tells yo.

MOSES

What if he do hea us—yo ain't afeared ob dat heathen, is yo?

BROTHER ELIJAH

No ah ain't, but we wants ter surprise him, don we?

MOSES

Sho right, Brudder Elijah—dat best business—surprise him. Maybe ah climbs up a tree an den shoots down on him?

BROTHER ELIJAH

No! No! Yo gets dem birds excited—dey makes noise an brings him out. Wait. [*Prays in a muffled tone.*] Lawd! Everythin was goin bad—everythin was goin down, down—de crops an de cattle, so us hea has done put away one heathen called Walthaw

what made our ways dark an yo name dust an now
we wants ter put away de las' one ob de heathens—
him what been de teacher ob him de name we just
done giben yo. Oh Lawd show us de way ter do it!
Amen!

ALL

Amen!

[*Long pause.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Suddenly.*]

De Lawd done spoke ter me! Bless His name!
Get yo guns—rush from each side pas his house
an fire at de house ob iniquity as yo comes in front
ob it.

[*Movement. Sounds of feet over dry leaves
and branches . . . Then a man with a gun
rushes on from R.—as he comes in front of
the hut he stops for an instant but fear over-
comes him—his gun drops and he is off L.
From L. another man appears and leaves the
stage with the same result. Then three more
rush on simultaneously but as soon as they
stop in front of the hut a light appears there.
Sound: a few shrill notes played on a wood-
wind instrument.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH'S VOICE

[*From L. Exhorting.*]

Shoot! Down goes de heathen! Blessed am de Lawd!

[*Overcome by the light and the sounds coming from the hut, they rush off pell-mell, leaving the guns in various parts of the stage. Within the hut a figure is stirring; the lantern—held high—permits an inspection of the interior of the hut. In the center is a large black stone; on the walls hang stuffed snakes and heads of various animals—hares, goats, sheep and a crudely distorted head of a human being carved out of soft wood. The figure—SENON—moves to the door, hangs the lantern on a hook outside and covering it with a piece of colored cloth returns to the hut, walking backward. Sounds: he is playing on the instrument heard before. Movement around the stone. From somewhere within the room: the sounds of small snare drums; then shrill voices incantating:*]

Uh—ab—nole—Senon—Senon—bayo—beuyo!

[*Movement: from R. come two and from L. come three men—the same we saw before—slowly moving to the rhythm of the music*

emanating from the hut. And now BROTHER ELIJAH's voice is heard—full of bitterness and tears.]

BROTHER ELIJAH

Don go dea! Don go! Yo done put dat away long ago! Has yo fo'gotten it? Come back hea—don be afeared ob his charms—dey don touch yo—yo is all Christians now—yo got de protection ob de Lawd an Jesus! Yo been baptized! Come back hea! We get him oddah time! [*Pause.*] Gib me sight Lawdy! Sen me eyes jes fo dis while. [*Pause. From L. comes BROTHER ELIJAH carrying a cross improvised hurriedly from two branches. He is feeling his way. Holding the cross aloft he sings.*] In de name ob de Lawd—de King ob de World ah comman's yo ter leabe dat spell off yo all an follow me. [*He walks to each one and touches him with the symbol which seems to release them from SENON's power for they follow BROTHER ELIJAH off stage. Pause. Then the two sticks fly towards the hut, thrown by BROTHER ELIJAH who shouts.*] De curse ob de Lawd 'pon yo Senon—heathen ob heathens!

[*The sounds within the hut stop abruptly.*

SENON comes out, picks up the sticks, takes off the lantern and is seen again inside plac-

ing the sticks on the stone; again circles the stone, plays upon the pipe, the drums are heard once more, then the voices—sounds end abruptly again.]

SENON

[An old man with dirty gray hair and beard; his walk is a straddle; his voice a whine; his clothes particolored and reminiscent of the Civil War period. Chanting.]

De sticks fo de job . . . de sticks fo de beginnin . . . de sticks fo de finish. . . . Now ah does it! Ah does it now! 'Cause dey done put him away! 'Cause dey done killed what me lobed! 'Cause dey done dat—ah's goin ter do it now. Look out! Once ah was yo god an yo brought me lots—now yo comes ter kill me—once we was one an yo joined wid me hea an now yo sings an prays on dat mountain. Now yo done killed de son ob Deborah 'cause he come hea an prayed wid me an now yo's aftah me. Now ah does it—yo gets it now—ah's powerful! Ah's great! Ah am de King ob Kings! Ah does what ah wants an ah can do mo! Yeouw! Yeow—ow—oh!

[The sounds begin again as SENON starts a wild dance around the stone, chanting and gesticulating.]

THE CURTAINS CLOSE.

SCENE TWO

Interior of a farmhouse—cramped, patched, irregular and barren; a few pieces of worn furniture; a massive Bible on a high table. Several chromos of Old and New Testament prophets—their faces slightly darkened and their features somewhat negroid.

A small hanging lamp illuminates the room.

In a corner a rifle of ancient vintage. Back center, a wide doorway and two windows—the panes missing. A roofless shed runs parallel to the house, back. A bit of sky can be seen through the doorway and windows. In front of the house—down stage—overhanging foliage which screens the frame of the room.

DEBORAH, in a tight mourning dress, is at the table folding a man's shirt and suit of clothes—slowly, caressingly. She is about sixty years old, tall, bony.

DEBORAH

[*In a reverie, sweetly and maternally.*]

Yo's got ter stop stampin 'roun, chile—makin mo noise dan a lot ob cattle,—dat a good boy. [*Pause.*] Now dat good singin, boy—keep it up. Hea is yo shirt fo yo, boy. Cleaned an ironed—yo mammy done set up late fixin it. But dea ain't nothin yo mammy wouldn' do fo yo. [*Pause.*] Hungry, son? Come hea—dea is somethin yo mammy made jes fo yo—jes fo yo. Hea it is all fixed up an ready. Dea! Don eat too fas'—take yo time—de work can wait. Yo mammy jes lobes ter see her boy sit an eat. Work? Mah boy works already! Big man! Growed fas' he did. Fas' as a weed. She sho don see how fas' he grow. Smile, son, an show yo mammy yo is happy. Dea! [*She claps her hands in joy.*] Oh big yo is! Oh! Big man! Big! Strong! Now we gets rich. When yo goin ter buy dat cow yo promised, ch son? [*Pause.*] Milk am good, boy. Sell some, keep rest fo ourselves. Den calf come, we sells it an buys . . . an buys . . . [*She is lost in her thoughts*] fix de roof . . . got de money all sabled up? Ah's ready. Take long time get ter town . . . come son. . . .

[*SENON appears in the shed . . . he shuffles about and then hides behind the window.*]

SENON

Heah ah is!

DEBORAH

[Awakened from her dream, utters a stifled cry.]

Walthaw! Walthaw! Son—whea—

[Rushes to the door—SENON comes into view. Seeing him she covers her eyes and returns to the table.]

SENON

[Maliciously.]

Thought me was Walthaw? Same voice—don blame yo. Don fooled yo dat time. *[Laughs.]* Yo been dreamin eh? *[Giggles.]* Thinkin won' bring him back nohow. He-he!

DEBORAH

[Coldly.]

Dea ain't been no call fo yo ter come hea.

SENON

Dat am de truf—de hones truf. But dea ain't been no call fo me fo a long time—not since yo done lef' me an—

DEBORAH

Go away—dis am a Christian home—yo ain't fit ter be hea.

SENON

[*Slyly.*]

Yo son—he was fit?

DEBORAH

[*Fiercely.*]

Don yo mention mah son no mo or ah gibes
yo—[*she checks her rage.*]

SENON

[*Amiably.*]

Oh now Ente—

DEBORAH

Don yo dare call me dat name!

SENON

What's wrong? Dat am yo name!

DEBORAH

Befo, not now. Since de big baptism my name ain't
dat but Deborah.

SENON

Fine lot ob names yo picked out ob dat book—
he-he-he! Don forget yo used ter be lak me an
joined me—

DEBORAH

Dat was long ago. Ah ain't no heathen now—

ah's been baptized an ah's holy now—thank de Lawd fo dat.

SENON

Sho—thank de Lawd fo takin Walthaw away too.

DEBORAH

Go away—don tempt me, yo debil—can't yo see mah heart—

SENON

It ain't mah fault—yo done gib him away—didn' yo? Didn' yo say right along “If he's willin he can take all ah got.” Ain't dat what yo said? an now hea yo go cryin cause He done took him. [*Cackles.*] How come? Yo done gib Walthaw away, didn' yo? [*Imitating DEBORAH.*] “Oh Lawd take all ah's got.” Didn' ah hea yo say dat on de mountain? Yo reads in dat book an does everythin it tells yo. [*Suddenly begins shouting and dancing around.*] An He done took him. Yo Lawd done took him 'cause yo tole Him ter take him. Ah don' blame Him at all. He wanted Walthaw. He need him.

DEBORAH

Shut yo mouf, yo debil. Shut yo mouf or . . .

[*She makes a move towards him.*]

SENON

All right! [*Pause.*] Yo can't say Ah tole yo 'cause Ah neber put no stock in yo prayin an singin—not me. [*Sings.*] Ah brings yo . . .

DEBORAH

[*To herself.*]

How come de Lawd lets him go on? How comes He don strike him dead? His debil charms don do him no good against de Lawd. [*Muses.*]

SENON

Why didn' yo listen ter me afore? [*Crying.*] An now dat po' boy ain't hea no mo. [*Suddenly rushes into the room and shouts.*] Ente, dea is someone missin hea! Who dat missin? He ain't hea no mo! Walthaw! Mah son too, cause Ah done took him fo a son! Walthaw, whea is yo? What yo done wid him, woman? Ah knowed him since he was born—what yo gib him away fo? Ain't yo done gib away enuff 'ready? [*Crooning.*] He ain't no mo! He ain't no more! Mah bes' fren'—mah partner—he ain't no mo. [*Pause, then suddenly.*] Woman, ah's goin ter bring yo son back! [*She looks at him wildly.*] Yes, ah's goin ter bring him back. What ah care 'bout yo Lawd wantin him? Ah can bring him back!

DEBORAH

[*Crying out.*]

Oh Lawd! Strike dis man dead—he done blasphemed yo name! [*She moves away back and stands watching SENON. Both are terrified. Long pause.*]

SENON

[*Weakly.*]

What yo done dat fo, woman?—Ah—ah ain't done nothin.

DEBORAH

[*Turning away from him and towards ihe audience.*]

Nothin happened ter him an he done blasphemed de Lawd's name. Nothin. He been doin dis fo a long time an nothin happen ter him.

[*Pause. SENON, recovering, tiptoes towards her. She moves away from him.*]

DEBORAH

Git out! None ob yo witchery hea!

SENON

Ah ain't goin ter do nothin—Ah jes wants ter tell yo dat ah ain't los' mah—[*He motions with his hands—she seems to understand and quickly puts*

the table between herself and him.] Dey done killed Walthaw 'cause yo Lawd tole dem ter an now dey wants ter kill me but ah's too powerful an dey runs away. But now yo sees mah work pretty soon. Ah done warned dem ter leave me an Walthaw alone. If yo wants ter sabe yo'self come an hide in mah place 'cause somethin terrible goin ter sweep 'round hea.

DEBORAH

Debil! What yo want ter get me in trouble wid de Lawd fo?

SENON

Ah ain't done no such thin'. What yo mean get yo in trouble wid de Lawd—don yo know ah's de Lawd's special messenger? Ain't He mah boss? Somethin sho wrong wid yo figgerin, woman. Sho is!

DEBORAH

Yo damned heathen! What yo goin ter do? Yo can' do nothin. De Lawd put up one finger an down yo go. Yo been sayin all de time—ah does somethin! Yo an yo powders an whistle an black stone. Yo done killed mah son—yo it was what done fetched him ter yo damned place ebery night!

SENON

Ain't mah fault dem niggers don want ter believe me—ain't mah fault. But ah does two things now ter show how powerful ah is! Ah does somethin' dey'll neber forget an ah brings back Walthaw. Ah shows him ter yo an den ah keeps him fo mahself an if ah dies he buries me lak ah should be not de way dey done ter him—throwed him in a hole. [*Sees the clothes on the table.*] What dat? Whea yo got dat? [*Bitterly.*] Rotten, stingy trash—yo took dat off his body ter sabe clothes fo de old man. [*Lets out a savage cry. DEBORAH runs to the corner and getting the rifle levels it at him.*]

DEBORAH

Out yo go now, yo black debil!

[*SENON moves to the table, snatches the clothes and runs out, DEBORAH at his heels. There is a wild scream from several women who suddenly appear in the shed and, trying to dodge SENON, run into the house gasping. Each one of them has a package.*]

NAOMI

What he doin hea?

MARY

Dat debil—he sho scared me!

SUZANNA

What dat man got—

DINA

Too bad she didn shoot him!

SERA

Lawdy ah 'most bumped inter him!

NAOMI

Lucky fo yo yo didn!

MARY

Did yo all see him?

NAOMI

Two ob dem togedder so much—Walthaw done listened to dat ole black debil all time. Eben dere voices got ter be de same.

SUZANNA

Too bad he ain't died 'stead ob Walthaw.

DINA

Too bad am right.

SERA

[*Whispering.*]

Now dat we got rid ob Walthaw, dis Senon ought ter be run out ob hea quickerin lightnin.

SUZANNA

He sho should.

DINA

What fo she let him come into de house fo?

MARY

She didn—she done chased him right out.

NAOMI

No man ter hab in de house.

MARY

He ain't no man—he a debil!

SERA

Yo sho am right. De worst nigger livin!

DINA

Yessam—de men folks been out tryin ter git him but—

MARY

[*Whispering.*]

Maybe she done turned back ter Senon an his—

[*Pause.*] She got a wil' temper. Sho has. Maybe dey plannin somethin ter—

[*DEBORAH enters.*]

NAOMI

[*Sweetly.*]

Deborah—sistah—we done come ter bring yo sympathy an ter make yo feel bettah.

SUZANNA

Dat sho was a terrible thing—losin yo son.

DINA

An aftah yo los' de oddah five too.

SERA

Sho am a shame.

NAOMI

He was a fine boy.

MARY

Yessam—a fine boy. A muddah sho am sore put in losin a son lak dat.

SUZANNA

Too bad he fooled wid dat no account Senon—wicked man dat Senon.

DINA

How come yo let him be frien wid him?

SERA

He sho lobed him—stay dea day an night an dance an—

SUZANNA

Senon teach him lots ob his tricks. Bad way come ter Walthaw. Sistah—we done come ter gib yo sympathy an ah brought yo some cakes—

NAOMI

Ah got some fine ham—

MARY

An ah's got somethin ter drink ter make yo fo'get yo—

DINA

An some chicken.

[*DEBORAH hasn't changed her position since she entered—she has given no sign of recognition to the women or greeted them. Long pause as they all watch her.*]

SERA

We sho is sorry fo you.

NAOMI

Yo sho has it bad—bad!

MARY

Sit down sistah an have somethin—

[DEBORAH's attitude freezes them into silence again.]

DEBORAH

Time ter stop. [*Interval.*] Time ter stop. [*She turns and faces the Bible, raises her voice.*] Time ter stop. [*Turns and is about to leave.*]

MARY

Whea yo goin, sistah? We done come ter—

DEBORAH

Time ter stop—de time done come ter open yo mouf an speak de truf dat am in de heart. [*To the door.*]

NAOMI

Whea ye goin, sistah?

DEBORAH

Ah's going ter hab a word wid de Lawd! [*Exit.*]

SUZANNA

What she mean "time ter stop"?

DINA

Goin to hab a word wid de *Lawd*?

SERA

Dat boy sho got her head twisted an me comin all de way hea wid dis bundle.

NAOMI

Looks as if she didn' lak de stuff we brought—
[*They unwrap the bundles.*] What yo got fo her, honey?

SERA

Some fresh baked corn bread.

NAOMI

Ah jes' wants a small bite ter see—

[*They crowd about each other and inspect the gifts—tasting and smelling them.*]

SUZANNA

Long walk up hea.

DINA

Ah's thirsty.

SERA

Take some ob dis drink.

DINA

Hab some ob my chicken.

[And there is a picnic.]

MARY

[Between mouthfuls.]

What she mean "hab a word wid de Lawd"?

[Picnic. But MARY grows uneasy, gets up and walks to the shed. The others stop eating and watch her.]

MARY

[Returning.]

She up on de mountain—Ah can hea her voice!

SERA

What she sayin?

MARY

*[Lost.]*Ah can hea—*[she listens.]* Ah can hea somethin in de air—does yo all hea somethin? Ah hea's wings—

SUZANNA

*[Faintly.]*Yes ah does. . . . *[They listen—MARY moves to the shed again.]*

NAOMI

Don leab us sistah.

DINA

Dat Senon put a spell on dis house.

[*Movement: ABNER crosses the stage down from L. to R. quickly. He is about DEBORAH's age, shaky, gouty, feeble. Long pause. They are listening. SERA goes to the shed.*]

SUZANNA

What—what Deborah sayin dea, can yo hea?

SERA

Prayin—askin fo—fo Walthaw ter come back—
[*Pause—then suddenly she rushes into the room.*]
She—she—les' go! Les' go! Somethin sho goin ter
happen now! Les' go! [*She exits quickly—the rest following her.*]

[*Movement: ABNER returns same way. Men's voices. The light within the house goes out. From right the six men rush on—carrying picks, shovels and mattocks. They are lost at the left. A faint red glow illuminates down stage. Long pause. Presently MOSES and BARNABAS back in.*]

MOSES

Lawd! Close to it!

BARNABAS

Close! [*Shouts.*] Gettin up! Touchin de top now! Branches fallin! Lawd Almighty! Let go! Come hea!

[*Sounds: crackling and sputtering of a forest fire.*]

MATTHIAS

[*Entering.*]

Dat fallin! Look out! [*Runs to left.*] Eben! Peter! Out ob it! [*Moves back.*] Look at Brudder Elijah! Right in it. Hey get Brudder—[*dashes off left.*]

MOSES

Lawd Almighty sabe dem! Sabe Brudder Elijah! He blin an don know whea he goin! Sabe him Lawdy! [*The rest back in.*]

BARNABAS

Don go dea Brudder Elijah—dat ain't no job fo yo.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Ah can see—de Lawd light de way fo me.

EBENEZER

She touchin on de top branches now.

ABNER

Dea ain't goin ter be much lef' when dat get through.

MOSES

Skippin ober eberythin an goin wes' now—de wind dat way.

BROTHER ELIJAH

It ain't de wind—it's de Lawd's hands. [*Pause.*]
De Lawd's comman'. His—

ABNER

Dat true. Dat sho am true. Ah nevah seen a fiah lak dat, nevah, an Ah seen a lot ob dem—dis one so quick! Lak lightnin! Got started no mo den half hour 'go.

BARNABAS

Nevah lak dis. Nevah! Yo am sabed, Abner,—de wind drive it away from yo place, only done touched yo woods. Goin wes'—look fo yo place, Eben—

EBENEZER

Les' go an dig a wide—

MATTHIAS

No, no! Yo can't get through dea now. Dat fiah done travelin too fas' fo us. No chance.

MOSES

How it started—yo knows?

BARNABAS

Yo woods—Abner?

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Surprised.*]

In yo woods, Abner?

BARNABAS

Sho. Seen dat mahself.

ABNER

Ah neber disbelieves a brudder.

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Suspiciously.*]

How come it done started in yo woods, Abner?

ABNER

Don know—ah was jes' comin home.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Cuttin wood?

ABNER

No.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Smokin meat?

ABNER

No.

EBENEZER

See dat! Done burned right through.

MATTHIAS

Wen ovah de fence.

PETER

Jumped right ovah—nothin stop it—Movin right
on—

BROTHER ELIJAH

Ah can see—de light so strong. Jes' lak dem
other days. Twenty yeahs gone back—twenty. It
ain't so much as a day or a minute an now once mo.

PETER

What yo sayin, Brudder Elijah?

ABNER

He sayin dat twenty yeahs 'go dea was fiahs—it
seem lak everythin gone back.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Fo twenty yeahs dea ain't been a fiah hea an now dis got ter come! [*Pause.*] Angry! Angry! Dat am it! De Lawd am angry!

ABNER

Angry wid us?

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Vehemently.*]

Dea am a sinnah hea! Dea's a sinnah hea dat made de Lawd angry! Who's de sinnah hea? Which ob yo all is de sinnah hea? Step up an speak! [*Pause.*] Who's hea?

ABNER

Ah's hea.

BROTHER ELIJAH

No—yo beliebes in de Lawd too strong ter sin. Who dea?

MOSES

We all hea 'ceptin de women folks an de chillun.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Ah knows dat. [*Preacher's tone.*] Look in yo hearts an see if yo done somethin dat make de Lawd angry. Each one ob yo all do dat fo de Lawd don

do nothin 'out he got a reason. It says so in de Holy Book. Ain't de one hea who am goin ter confess up an sabe us all? Look at de fiah burnin up everythin we got! What de reason fo dat? Dea's a sinnah hea! Who de sinnah? Ain't dea one hea willin ter speak? Does ah hab ter call 'pon de Lawd ter point him out? [*Pause.*] If yo all ain't sinned yo'selfs, speak for yo women folks. How come Deborah ain't been ter prayer meetin las' night, Abner? [*Pause.*] Whea yo answer, Abner?

ABNER

Ah don know. Ah don go in de house much now. She so mixed since Walthaw gone.

BROTHER ELIJAH

She sorry fo dat heathen boy? Dat was de com-man ob de Lawd!

MATTHIAS

Dea's someone runnin dea!

SEVERAL

Whea? Who?

PETER

Comin dis way.

[*NAOMI appears.*]

NAOMI

She—Deborah—she standin on de mountain at de cross prayin, prayin—den she begin askin de Lawd fo Walthaw—sudden she cursed an blasphemed de Lawd's name! An as we hears de words comin out ob her mouf we sees de sky come red. Run an tell Brudder Elijah, ah says.

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Heavily.*]

Dea am goin ter be a sinnah judged tonight! Dea am goin ter be a sinnah judged tonight! A sinful mudder goin ter join her sinful son.

ALL

Oh Lawd sabe us!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Hab anodder grabe ready!

ALL

Oh Lawd hab mussey on us!

[*Pause.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

De Lawd's angry an de earth aint full ter de top yet!

ALL

Oh—Lawdy—hallelujah! Oh Lawdy sabe us!

CURTAIN.

SCENE THREE

Same setting as Scene Two.

DEBORAH is setting the table for three. Her movements and gestures are brief and staccato as if she were thinking of the next move. Thus she puts down a plate—her hand goes up in the air and she holds that position until the next move. It seems as if she were expecting an answer—an echoing gesture or movement to everything she does, but as nothing comes she begins all over again. . . .

She is listening . . . then gazes at the door . . . now she is paying particular attention to the third place at the table; she rearranges the position of the chair, changes the plates.

Suddenly she awakens—her head makes a three-quarter circle about the room—her hands drop to the table.

The sky outside becomes red for an instant.

DEBORAH

Oh, Lawd, fo'gibe me, but ah done reached de end an jes couldn help speakin lak ah done. [*Tone changes to offensive.*] What fo ah prayed all dem yeahs? What fo ah carried all dem chillun in mah belly fo? What fo ah had to drag dem out into dis world? Ebery time it looked lak peace fo me yo—yo done broke it up. Ah jes' couldn help speakin—Jes couldn—jes—[*tone changes to defensive.*] Wid Walthaw ah seen peace an yo took him away. Gib him back ter me an ah keeps still. Ah goes back ter de mountain an sings an prays again—dat ain't no mo dan fair—no mo. [*ABNER comes in cautiously and watches her. Softly whispering.*] Ah brings yo Senon—we makes a change. Ah gets him dead or alibe an brings him ter yo ter change for mah son. [*Pause.*] But if yo don want ter gib me mah son back—gib me de t'ings what Walthaw done promise me—t'ings ter make mah ole yeahs peaceful. Ah wants—

[*ABNER moves to the table.*]

ABNER

Yo got ter get dat boy out ob yo head—got ter! He ain't neber comin back.

DEBORAH

[Recovering, defiantly.]

He *am* comin back—he got ter come back!

ABNER

Dey nevah comes back—his soul *am* in de Lawd's keepin now. Take dat plate away. We ain't got 'nuff ter eat ourselbes ter feed ghosts too. De wages ob sin *am* death—it *am* printed in dat book dea. Yo son done sinned an got punished. Grass don grow on his grabe—grass neber grow on sinnah's grabe. In peace—his soul *am* restin in peace now. *[Sits down—continues to watch her. In prayerful attitude begins saying grace—slowly and fervently.]* Fo what we *am* 'bout ter receibe may de—*[stops, looks at his wife who has been silent—then raises his voice.]* Fo what we *am* 'bout ter receibe may de Lawd make us . . .

[Stops again. He feels her antagonism and is bent upon forcing an issue. Gets up—leans over the table and looks directly into DEBORAH's face. His voice is full of emotion and anger. He measures every word and waits for her to repeat it.]

ABNER

Fo—

Fo

DEBORAH

—what—

ABNER

what

DEBORAH

—we am—

ABNER

we am

DEBORAH

ABNER AND DEBORAH

—bout to receibe may de Lawd make us truly thankful. Fo Jesus' sake, Amen!

[He sits down. Long pause. Neither eats.]

ABNER

[The doom of the world in his voice.]

Dea ain't goin ter be no grain, no corn, no potatoes or nothin dis yeah.

DEBORAH

Why not?

ABNER

Dea am a fiah roamin through de woods eatin up

eberythin. Dat fiah done started in our woods. De terrible wrath ob Gawd am 'pon us once mo 'cause—'cause someone done made de Almighty angry. [*Pauses—then fearfully.*] Dea am words whispered 'mong folks—

DEBORAH

[*Apprehensively.*]

What words?

ABNER

Dey say dey heard somethin in de air—

DEBORAH

Yo ain't afeared ob dat, is yo?

ABNER

Ah ain't but dea is bein said dat it done happen right aftar somebody prayed on de mountain awhile ago. [*He is watching her intently.*] Same time de fiah started in our woods. Yo ain't heard nothin, has yo?

DEBORAH

How ah know? Ah wasn' dea.

ABNER

Whea yo been 'fo supper?

DEBORAH

Hea—right hea.

ABNER

What yo all 'cited 'bout? [*Stands up.*] What fo yo lyin ter me? Yo was dea—standin 'fore de cross talkin ter de Lawd lak yo was an angel an den cursin an blaspheming His name! Dat am de worse sin! An dat's de reason we ain't goin ter hab no crops—dat's why dea is a fiah—de Lawd am angry!

DEBORAH

[*Weakening.*]

Who see me?

ABNER

It ain't yo fault yo done it, 'cause Satan done tempted yo. Sister Naomi she done heard Satan shoutin: "Now smite her, Lawd—she done blasphemed yo name!"

DEBORAH

[*Defiant and triumphant at the same time.*]

An why didn de Lawd smite me?

ABNER

[*Lost.*]

'Cause—[*Pause.*] Ah don know de workin's ob

de Lawd's min'. Maybe 'cause de time ain't come yet. Tonight yo find out.

DEBORAH

[*Losing her bravado—anxiously.*]

What happen tonight? What goin ter happen?
[*Pause.*] Abner—Ah been hones' ter yo all dem yeas we been married?

ABNER

Yes.

DEBORAH

Ah ain't nebah lied or cheated anybody, has ah?

ABNER

No.

DEBORAH

Anybody ebah say ah ain't been hones'? [*Pause.*]
Yo don want me ter be no liar now, does yo? Den yo can' make me ter be differen dan what ah feels in mah own heart.

ABNER

What yo feel? What a body know how she feels?
It's de Lawd dat knows—He!

DEBORAH

Fo twenty yeaHS ah wen' up ter dat mountain ter sing an pray an ah did mah duty full an com-plete 'cordin ter dat book. Ah thanked de Lawd when dea was nuthin special ter thank an praise him fo.

ABNER

[*Terrified.*]

Stop dat talk, woman! Stop sayin dem things again! Ah warns yo—ain't we got 'nuff trouble?

DEBORAH

[*Persisting.*]

What was dea fo me ter thank Him fo? Nothin! We ain't no bettah now dan we was twenty yeaHS ago when we done stamped our feet ter Senon's noise things. What good de big baptism do us? Six chillun born ter Deborah an five chillun die wid Deborah watchin by dem. Deborah singin praises ter de Lawd fo givin her five chillun an den makin dem die. Ebery time a chile born ter Deborah she sing ter de Lawd an ebery time a chile dies Deborah sing ter de Lawd 'gain. Why she done dat? 'Cause de Lawd done lef' her one son an [*Pause*] 'cause she done hoped He'll spare dis one. An what de Lawd do? He take de las' son an put him deep in de same mountain whea she been prayin an singin ter

him. [*Pause.*] An now Deborah got ter eat her bread alone. Jesus! Joshua! Moses! What He done dat fo? [*Sings in a harsh and mocking tone.*]

*“Oh come loud anthems let’s sing,
Loud thanks ter de mighty Lawd”—*

ABNER

Wasn’ he mah son too? But ah ain’t said nothin ’cause ah knows dat’s de way wid de Lawd. He done it many time ’fo. In de Holy Book it tell ob Isaac an Job—He done wanted ter tes’ us.

DEBORAH

Tes’ us? Didn He hab tes’ ’nuff? He knows de inside ob mah heart.

ABNER

Yo allays said de Lawd’s ways ain’t de same as man’s an now yo—

DEBORAH

Dat was ’fo ah learned—

ABNER

Learned what?

DEBORAH

Nebba min'.

ABNER

What yo learned, woman?

DEBORAH

Ah ain't in de feelin' fo ter tell now.

ABNER

What kin' ob secrets yo got 'bout now? Yo bettah be careful—de folks in no min' now fo debil tricks no mo.

DEBORAH

Dis ain't no secret—yo all knows dis. Brudder Elijah been sayin it las' twenty yeahs. [*Pause.*] Dis—de ways ob de Lawd ain't no differen from de ways ob men.

ABNER

Brudder Elijah he say dat differen.

DEBORAH

But he do say dat de Lawd walk on de earth?

ABNER

Yes,

DEBORAH

Do he say de Lawd come ter visit, ter watch an ter punish?

ABNER

Dat de Lawd's own way—

DEBORAH

If He do all dem things He don stop from actin de way men do—He got spite an hatred an jealousy in Him.

ABNER

Oh Lawd sabe dis woman from mah wrath! Gib me strength ter wait till mah anger go away. [*The savage in him bursts out.*] Ah's goin ter kill yo if you say 'nother word. Woman, fall on yo knees an thank de Lawd fo lettin yo see de sun! Fall down an pray ter Him right now or ah can see yo flyin straight inter de fiahs ob hell!

[*The sky becomes red again. MOSES is seen lurking in the shed. He motions to ABNER who goes to him.*]

DEBORAH

[*To herself.*]

Got ter fight! Got ter stan' mah groun'! Ah

wants mah son back or ah gets what ah needs 'stead ob him. Ah wondah what dah fiah mean? Maybe de Lawd after me! Den maybe ah bettah make peace wid Him. No, ah won't! Let dem fiahs burn eberythin! Ah ain't got nothin ter lose. He can't touch me much!

[*ABNER reënters.*]

ABNER

Heard what Mose said?

DEBORAH

Mose? Whea yo seed him?

ABNER

He hea jes' secon' 'go.

DEBORAH

Hea? Ah didn' see him. What dey mean comin hea lak dat? Spyin on me? What dey goin ter do?

ABNER

De fiah am nea Eben's place an it am jes' eatin eberythin up—dea's goin ter be a prayer meetin on top—

DEBORAH

Ain't goin!

ABNER

Yo is! Yo got ter go! Yo want dis place wipe out? It ain't far away from it.

DEBORAH

Instead ob prayin dey bettah fight de fiah.

ABNER

Dat ain't done no good. It am all in de Lawd's han's now. Yo comin? [*Meaningly.*] Yo ain't goin ter turn back ter Senon, is yo?

DEBORAH

Ah ain't goin ter turn back—ah remains steady ter de Lawd an ah hopes de Lawd do de same ter me. But ah's goin ter wait 'till ah gets what ah done ask fo an den ah gives up an prays.

ABNER

[*There are tears in his voice.*]

Deborah, all yo life yo been mindful ob eberybody's feelin's. Yo allus preached ter me dat ah wasn' holy 'nuff—dat ah didn' follow de Holy Book lak it was set down. Yo kept mah ears buzzin wid words an stories from de Bible an yo said dat if one sins all sins an de one got ter live an be sabed fo all

sakes. An now yo own folks am nea destruction an yo stan' dea an blaspheme de Lawd's name in whose han's all us is. Ah ain't no man ter be talkin ter yo 'cause yo been next ter Brudder Elijah our bes' preacher an de light ob Jesus use ter be in yo eyes. Sabe us, Deborah—'cause yo can do it. [*Pause.*] Is yo comin'?

[*DEBORAH shakes her head.*]

ABNER

[*Thundering.*]

Den dey comes hea!

[*Suddenly the whole community appears in the shed. MOSES enters the room. The tempo of the action and lines following is quick and sharp. The people in the shed are restive and keep shifting about.*]

MOSES

Sistah, we is hea ter ask yo ter come an join us in a prayer meetin ter pray de Lawd fo ter sabe us from de trouble dat come 'bout. Is yo ready?

DEBORAH

Don yo trust in de Lawd no mo?

MOSES

Dea ain't no one else we trust in but de Lawd an dat why we is goin ter show our faith in Him when we is hit hardest.

DEBORAH

Yo all can show yo faith in Him 'thout me, can't yo?

BARNABAS

[*Entering.*]

Dey ain't been no fiah hea in twenty yeas—yo knows it yo'self—not one since we done throwed down Senon—not since we got ter know de Lawd lak we do now. 'Fo dat eberybody know dat de fiahs hea so bad dat people say dis was hell place. Why a fiah break out now? An now nobody stop it but de Lawd.

DEBORAH

Why don He?

BARNABAS

'Cause yo sinned! Yo spoke up ter de Lawd!

DEBORAH

Ah had right.

BARNABAS

Dey ain't nobody got right ter quarrel wid Him!
What right yo got?

DEBORAH

De sorrow ah hab gib me de right.

NAOMI'S VOICE

What got inter yo head ter say dat? Ain't we
all had—?

MARY'S VOICE

Dey ain't none ob us ain't had no sorrows but we
didn fly in de Lawd's face lak yo.

SUZANNA'S VOICE

An yo son had ter be rid of—
[*The women come in.*]

DINA

We all done had our sorrows an troubles but we
neber make no big cry lak yo did.

SERA

Ah los' more'n yo—

DEBORAH

[*After a long pause.*]
Ah got reason ter cry mah sorrow!

BROTHER ELIJAH'S VOICE

Dat ain't no mo dan right. Lead me in, Eben. [*They make way as the old preacher is led in—the rest following him.*] Yo got reason ter cry yo sorrows—plenty reason. Ah ain't nevah seen no woman 'thout no sorrow hidden in her heart. Dey got ter hab dem. A woman wid no sorrow am lak a tree wid no branches on it; lak a spindle wid no thread in it; lak a cow dat dropped her las' calf. Sistah Deborah—know dat dey ain't no man but dat he pray fo his bread; dey ain't no dawg but he bark fo his bone; dey ain't no cloud but dat Gawd made it an dey ain't no sannah but he go ter hell an dey ain't no woman dat evah fo'gets her sorrows. Long time 'go we done had plenty sorrows—'cause we neber gabe no thought ter de Lawd. We done worked in His fields, planted His seeds, took in His crops an never gabe Him a word ob thanks. An den one day come de big baptism! [*From here on all the people—with the exception of DEBORAH—repeat—sometimes silently, sometimes audibly, everything that comes from BROTHER ELIJAH'S lips. The references to the deity are especially featured.*] We saw de face ob de Lawd Almighty—de King ob Kings! [BROTHER ELIJAH followed by the rest

covers his face with his hands, kneels quickly and gets up again.]

BROTHER ELIJAH

Den we foun' de true life an built a memory ter Him on de mountain an sang hymns ob praise 'cordin ter de holy book an His own prophets. Den a miracle come! De fiahs wen out lak de light ob de candle at de biddin ob de wind. Fo He am eberywhere! Hea—he a dea—He help us plant an harves'—he tread de fiel's an de meadows. He watch ter see dat we doin no wrong fo He am our judge an keeper. He am listenin an lookin at us now an who say *no* ter dat am goin ter feel de *terrible wrath of de Lawd!* An yo Deborah—yo got no words ter say now—yo seal yo lips—ah knows yo thoughts am as black as yo skin. Yo was de first one ter lead us in singin an prayin—ah sees de sky ovah us an half de world at our feet an de win stops wailin an de birds stop chirpin all ter listen ter yo voice singin ob de gran' world de Lawd done created. And now yo turns 'round an starts a rebellion 'gainst de Lawd. Yo sho am goin' ter be a disappointment ter de Lawd. Yo see what happen ter yo son? He rebel 'gainst de Lawd too. De Lawd done ordered fo us ter put him away from us an he wasn' eben buried lak a Christian. Remember

dat. Twenty yeahs 'go we was partners ob Senon an in darkness; now we is wid de Lawd an we can see de light far away. [*Kindly.*] Sister Deborah—go ter de mountain an ask de Lawd ter forgibe yo—we don' want ter charge yo befo' de Lawd—make way fo her. [*They comply at once.*]

DEBORAH

He know eberythin an don need yo tellin!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Ah orders yo ter—

DEBORAH

Ah ain't goin ter stir mahself out ob dis house!

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Feeling his way towards her, his fists clenched.*]

Ebil woman! [*His arms are in the air—he mumbles an oath.*] No! [*Retraces his steps.*] No! [*Pause.*] De Lawd can take care ob himself.

MATTHIAS

[*Venturing.*]

But we ought ter stan' up for de Lawd—he 'spects us ter—don he stan' up fo us?

BROTHER ELIJAH

Don touch her—de Lawd can take care ob him—

self—it ain't fo us ter judge her. [*Pause—then with sudden fury.*] Brudders an sistahs! We brings dis woman ter de judgment ob de Lawd Almighty! Amen!

VOICES

Amen! Amen!

[*Turmoil: Shouting, gesticulating, crowding about BROTHER ELIJAH.*]

ALL

Amen! Amen!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Lak de Lawd judge de sinnahs ob old, so yo Deborah goin ter be judged by de Lawd. Dea by dat cross yo is goin ter stan' judgment on dis earth an yo is goin ter go de way de odder four sinnahs went. De wages ob sin am death an tonight yo sees death as yo nebah has seen it.

[*Movement: Led by BROTHER ELIJAH they move around DEBORAH.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*The others accompanying him with shrieks, shouts and vocalisms.*]

Count yo days . . .

Count yo days!

Count yo days, sinnin sistah

Count yo days

Count yo days!

Put 'em in a sack

Put 'em in a sack—

Count yo days, sinnin sistah

Count yo days

Count yo days!

De sack got holes

De sack got holes

Count yo days, sinnin sistah

Count yo days

Count yo days!

De sack am full o' holes

De sack am full o' holes

Count yo days, sinnin sistah

Count yo days

Count yo days!

For music to this spirituel, see page 117.

ALL

De sack am full ob holes!

[*They exit still singing. ABNER remains in the doorway, forlorn, helpless, bewildered. He comes back into the room—moves towards*

DEBORAH *but the voices outside seem to call him and he exits watching her.*]

DEBORAH

Jesus! Joshua! Moses! Ah allays done spoke yo names in holy fea. Protec' me now. Ah done brought a lot on mah head! But a body's life ain't long—she ain't got much time ter remember but she got less time ter fo'get. Don blame me 'cause ah can't fo'get mah son! It keep comin inter dis heart ob mine, fo de memory am strong. It's in de heart an ah can't get it out noways at all! [*Sound: Ringing of a crude "hoop-gong" is heard coming from the mountain. DEBORAH falls on her knees and the following prayer is impassioned and sensual.*] Oh Lawd yo wouldn' take de sun away from de earth, would yo? It am dark hea, Oh Lawd—dark hea now. Ebery time ah said a prayer ter yo ah saw yo listenin an ah saw yo walkin an talkin ter us. Oh Lawdy ah lobes yo! Wid all mah heart ah lobes yo!

[*Falls to the ground—rolling around. The bell continues to ring. Then voices are heard singing. DEBORAH gets up and listens.*]

DEBORAH

[In a trembling voice.]

Ah ain't comin! Ah stays hea! De Lawd am hea too! Deborah don hab ter go dea! If she got ter stan' judgment she do it hea! Hea! Don want ter go. . . . No . . . *[Almost like a magnet the sound of the bell and the voices pull her; first to the table, then to the Bible to which she clings; then to one side of the room.]* Don go . . . Ah ain't a-comin! *[Faintly.]* Ah ain't a . . .

[At the other side of the door, a few steps more and she is in the shed . . . her voice joins those of the chorus on the mountain and her body, swaying sideways, moves out of sight as the curtains hide the stage.]

SCENE FOUR

On the top of a mountain. Trees. A large wooden cross—back center. About it are grouped the people with BROTHER ELIJAH in front. The prayer meeting is in progress when the scene begins. It is ardent, turbulent, tempestuous. At intervals a red flare illuminates the scene.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Whose gift dat rain do fall?

ALL

De Lawd's!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Who done made de earth fruitful?

ALL

De Lawd Almighty!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Who done made beasts increase an fish multiply?

ALL

De King ob Kings!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Behold, we beseeches de affection fo Dy people an grant dat de trouble which we does justly suffah be stopped. All glory ter de Lawd! An now an for-
eber, Amen!

ALL

Amen!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Ain't she hea yet?

VOICES

No, ain't come yet.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Oh muhciful Father who in de time ob Elijah de Prophet did suddenly in Samaria great scarcity an dearth turn into cheapness—hab muhcy 'pon us! Though we who am now fo our sins punished may lakwise find relief, grant dat we receibe Dy bountiful goods fo de relief ob de needy an our comfort! Amen!

ALL

Amen.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Glory ter de Lawd!

ALL

Glory ter de Lawd!

BROTHER ELIJAH

She hea?

VOICES

No.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Oh Lawd hea us! Oh Lawd forgibe us! Oh Lawd harken! [*He turns and points his finger R.*] Deborah—yo is called at de special comman ob de Lawd ter stan' judgment hea befo' Him! Yo can't hide from de Almighty! He done move de earth an ebery corner. He knows whea yo is now. Ah calls yo once mo ter come hea. Brethren an sistahs—de wages ob sin am death—yo finds dat law in de Holy Book. If Deborah guilty she die lak a common trash sinnah; if she ain't, dat means she ain't de sinnah an dat someone else hea am de guilty one an'll hab ter stan' judgment 'cordin. So prepare yo'selves fo de trial. [*Pause.*] Once mo—ah leabes de comman of man out an in de name ob de Lawd ah orders yo Deborah ter come hea an submit ter de judgment

ob de Lawd. Ring dat bell! [*The bell is rung.*]
Dis am de las' call, Deborah!

[*They are watching breathlessly.*]

NAOMI

[*Exultantly.*]

She come! She come! Hea she am!

BROTHER ELIJAH

De power ob de Lawd again! See how powerful
de Lawd am! Deborah come ter submit! A sinnah
come ter submit 'fore de Lawd! Hea, yo all! A
sinnah come ter repent an be judged! Dey's
goin ter be joy in heaven 'cause a sinnah come ter
repent! Les gib thanks ter de Lawd!

ALL

Amen!

[*DEBORAH approaches.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

Deborah—step up hea! [*DEBORAH does so.*] Is
yo ready ter submit?

DEBORAH

Ah ain't!

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Disappointed—in a tremulous voice—omi-
nously.*]

Deborah—yo got ter submit! Yo got ter repent!

Yo can't be judged if yo don. Yo got ter do it ter sabe us all! Dea ain't many ob us lef' an dea ain't much lef'. Pretty soon nobody hea. Pretty soon no mo smoke from chimneys—no mo men an no mo women—no prayers—no singin—only dogs barkin an dat ain't no song fo de Lawd ter listen ter. All goin ter be too late pretty soon—now de time! Yo got ter submit an be judged. Yo an ah ain't got long ter look at de sun an countin our days ter come ain't in order now, fo de summons ter get an go am on de way. [*His voice falls into a singing tone.*] On de way . . . We got ter submit . . . We am lak trees 'fo a win'—do de tree say ah won't submit? Do it? [*Pause.*] Answer hea an now 'fore Gawd an men—is yo goin ter submit 'fore de Lawd an stan' judgment?

DEBORAH

[*Cold, brazen, defiant.*]

'Fo ah does—ah wants all dem songs an prayers back. Ah wants mah son back! Den ah submits.

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Thundering.*]

Bring dat woman ter be judged by de Lawd Almighty! [*He points to the foot of the cross where*

she is carried immediately by several men and women. Terror seizes them all but no time is given to show it, for BROTHER ELIJAH begins again.] Spread de carpets fo de King ob Kings to tread on! Spread de carpets! [Pieces of colored rags are spread all over the ground.] Now let her be judged by de Judge ob Judges—by de King ob Kings—by de master ob eberythin! Oh Lawd—judge her fo de sins she done committed against yo an for de trouble she done brought 'pon us all. [Pause. Automatically the people move away from the center so as to be as far away from the cross as possible. His body begins to sway like a spiral top.] Ah hears wings in de air . . . angel's wings . . . [Interval.] Is yo ready? Is you ready? [Interval.] We got ter go . . . We got ter go . . . a visitor am acomin . . . prepare fo company . . . we got ter go ter meet . . . who's acomin?

ALL

Who's acomin . . . ? Who's acomin . . . ?

BROTHER ELIJAH

We got ter go ter meet de . . . meet de Lawd . . . [Their bodies make designs in the air as the rhythm of the words takes hold of them.] De

La-wd co-meth . . . ter vi-sit an ter se-e . . . ter
judge an ter pu-nish . . . ter gib an ter take . . .
ter gib an ter take . . . He cometh . . . Is yo
ready?

ALL

Yes we is!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Ter accept de Lawd?

ALL

Yes we is!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Is yo hearts clean?

ALL

We trusts in de Lawd!

BROTHER ELIJAH

We is all ready ter receibe de Lawd an His angels
come ter judge one Deborah who done sinned against
de Lawd! [*Changes tone.*] Lawd—lift Dy counte-
nance 'pon us an judge dis woman fo her sins an sabe
us all. If she not de sinnah point out through her
de real one an comman us ter punish him 'cordin ter
yo judgment which am right an just. [*Pause.*]

Moves down.] Hea de trumpets blowin! Hea de trumpets ob de angels blowin! Comin! He am comin! Hide yo faces. [*They fall upon the ground*—BROTHER ELIJAH turns front now. *Sounds: Two short fierce blasts on trumpets. Lights: begin to change. Sounds: a round of thunder, then of lightning.*] He comin! Hea de gates ob heaben open! Hea de music ob de angels! Brethren an sistahs—De Hosts ob Hosts am comin ter judge a sinnah! Ah feels—Ah feels de presence. Mussey, mussey . . . [*He falls to the ground. Lights: For the duration of several seconds the stage is flooded with the kind of light appropriate to the representation of the vision in the minds of the characters. DEBORAH is seen raising herself—holding on to the cross—pleading. She too falls to the ground. Lights begin to change. Sounds: Trumpets, thunder and lightning as before.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

[From the ground—sotto voce.]

De visitor done left us . . . de heabenly visitor am gone—de judge done judged a sinnah. Collect de holy carpets an put dem away.

[Slowly, fearfully, the people get up, collect the rags and fold them carefully. DEBORAH lies pros-

trate before the cross. ELIJAH faces DEBORAH.]
May de Lawd be mussiful ter her soul. She done was judged an found guilty. Go, Brudders, an dig her a grabe in a high an dry place fo she was once a good woman afeard ob de Lawd. Go an gib her de peace ob de earth.

[Pause. The men stand rigid for a few seconds and then go up towards DEBORAH, but before coming close to her, they stop. All eyes are on DEBORAH who is stirring . . . the men turn in their paces. DEBORAH rises.]

DEBORAH

[There is a malicious grin on her face.]

Ah been judged and yo hears mah voice as ah heard de voice ob de Lawd.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Who . . . am . . . de sinnah 'mong us?

DEBORAH

De sinnah—*[but before she can finish the sentence they are all on their knees—excepting BROTHER ELIJAH and ABNER—praying, shouting, beating the air with their fists.]*

VOICES

Fo'gibe us Lawd! Sabe us!

[BROTHER ELIJAH *raises his hands high over him and the turmoil subsides.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

Speak, sistah what heard de voice ob de Lawd!

DEBORAH

De sinnahs am all ob yo! An de fiah He done sent ter punish yo fo takin judgment 'pon yo'selbes—fo puttin away Walthaw an standin up 'fore de Lawd wid yo hearts full ob sins.

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Humbly.*]

What we got ter do?

DEBORAH

Wait fo de anger ob de Lawd ter stop 'cause His will am done made up. Dat fiah am goin ter go on an dea ain't no use yo tryin ter stop it—dat am de message an de will ob de Lawd!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Am dea a special message fo me ter speak ter de brethren an sistahs?

DEBORAH

He ain't said nothin special ter tell yo.

BROTHER ELIJAH

De will ob de Lawd am strong an powerful. Glory be ter de Lawd. Brethren an sistahs, we is condemned—dat's de will ob de Lawd an we got ter submit.

MATTHIAS

[*Questioningly.*]

Yo means we got ter let eberythin go ter de fiah?

DEBORAH

Dat's his word an message.

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Skeptically.*]

Yo sho de Lawd done judged us too?

DEBORAH

Yo all been judged.

PETER

What us all got ter do now?

DEBORAH

Wait fo de mussey ob de Lawd.

SEVERAL VOICES

De mussey ob de Lawd. De mussey ob de Lawd.
[*Long pause.*]

MOSES

Brudder Elijah, ebery time yo heard de voice ob
de Lawd yo done showed us a sign—whea am De-
borah's sign?

BROTHER ELIJAH

Whea am yo sign from de Lawd?

DEBORAH

[*Stumped.*]
Don need no sign—He done tole me so.

MOSES

Brudders an sistahs—in de Bible de Lawd always
gib a sign ter de prophets dat He gib messages ter.

SEVERAL VOICES

Dat right!

EBENEZER

Whea am yo sign?

BROTHER ELIJAH

Dat am true. Brudders an sistahs—we can't be-
liebe dis woman fo she ain't got no sign ter show dat

she done heard de voice ob de Lawd—go an sabe yo homes an yo belongings!

DEBORAH

Yo tells dem ter rebel 'gainst de will ob de Lawd? Yo ain't fo'get de powah ob de Lawd has yo, Brud-der Elijah?

BROTHER ELIJAH

Ah trusts de Lawd but ah ain't yet ready ter trust no man or no woman 'cept when dea is a sign from de Lawd. Whea am yo sign?

A VOICE

[*From far off.*]

Hea am yo sign! Mah voice am de sign!

ALL

Walthaw! Walthaw's voice! [*Turmoil again.*]

VOICES

Lawd sabe us! Lawdy hab muhcy on us!

THE VOICE

Dis am de voice ob Walthaw who yo all done judged an killed. He ain't done nothin ter yo. De Lawd send de fiah ter punish yo fo killin Walthaw

an dat am a warnin not ter touch Senon. [*Pause.*]
De Lawd's goin ter speak ter yo all again soon an
den yo all know what's goin ter happen to yo. Ah
comes back wid de message when de fiah am all out.
Wait fo me heah. If yo wants ter be fo'giben an
tole de message ob de Lawd come hea when all de
fiah am out. Ah goes now.

[*Long pause.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

Woman dat heard de voice ob de Lawd—we be-
liebes yo now. Sabe yo brudders an sistahs. Tell
dem de way ter salbation, woman dat heard de voice
ob de Lawd!

[*DEBORAH—as if in a dream, moves to L. and
gazes into the distance. She is watched by
all who are by now awed and static. DE-
BORAH returns to her former position.*]

DEBORAH

Soon come de day . . . ob judgment. [*Pause.*]
Be ready!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Tell us de way ter salbation!

DEBORAH

[Caught by the mystery of it all gives way to emotional stress.]

Ah's wicked—Ah didn' hea de voice ob de Lawd!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Don say no mo now! Yo did! 'Cause dea was de sign in de voice ob yo son! Don' leab us now, sistah, don fo'sake us now!

DEBORAH

[Weakly.]

Ah did—yo says ah did? De voice ob mah son Walthaw—was dat de sign?

VOICES

Dat was de sign!

[DEBORAH turns to the cross for help—then back again to the people.]

DEBORAH

[First in a dismal tone—then in a crescendo—driving, sweeping up to an abrupt end.]

De dead arisin? Dis sho am de end ob de world! Dis am de judgment day fo all de souls! De fiah ob Hell been sent down hea for us! Brethren an sistahs sabe yo'selbes! De fiah ob Hell—in de fiah

ob Hell de Lawd sent down yo all 'll fin salbation!
Go an purify yo bodies an souls—burn out yo sins
an debils in yo fo de end ob de world done come!

*[The sky is tintured with a deep red. From
the lips of the beaten, mystified and dazed
people come the first notes of a minor key
spiritual and they file out as the curtains
close.]*

SCENE FIVE

Same setting. DEBORAH is upstage, looking directly L. Beside her is ABNER. Below, seated in a semi-circle with BROTHER ELIJAH in the center, are the rest—barefooted, their clothes in shreds, hatless.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Stop de tide, Lawd—don let it rain no mo. De groun don need it—de groun ain't goin ter gib us nothin no mo. Put away dat sun fo good! When dea is light Oh Lawd we got ter see—*[with a cry]* An Oh Lawdy we don want ter see—'cause dea ain't nothin ter see.

VOICES

Don want ter see!

BROTHER ELIJAH

What am dat dea yondah? *[They all look.]* Am dat a tree full ob fruit? Or a flowah bush? Am

dose chillin playin 'round it? No—dat used ter be but ain't no mo. Am dat a mule dea ready ter carry a burden? Am dat a burden dea ready fo de mule? No—dat ain't a mule an dea ain't no burden ter carry. Gib me mah cup ob milk, Maizie—mah lips am parched an ah's thirsty. Dea ain't no cow ter gib milk no mo. Dea ain't nothin libin or dead fo de comfort ob man or beast. Look in Moses an see if Eben am comin ter de meetin—dea ain't no light in der windah an dea ain't no eyes ter see through. Eben dea sittin thinkin ob yesterday. Oh Lawd we is thankful dat yo spared us our libes! We is thankful ter yo. We done as yo comman us ter do—our bodies an souls am purified—we hopes yo done fo'giben us our sins. Send yo messenger hea ter gib us yo message. Walthaw—come an tell us what de Lawd done said—we done 'cordin ter his word. [*Sounds: from far off come the same sounds heard in the first scene. BROTHER ELIJAH gets up followed by the rest.*] Oh Lawd sen' down a fiah ter burn dis heathen an de rest ob de debils out. He am lak a tree dat bear no fruit—it can't blossom nor gibe shade. It only bring us trouble—let's go an stop dat debil. [*Moves towards R. when Walter's voice is heard.*]

THE VOICE

Stop whea yo is now. Don move . . . [*Shouts.*] Senon—Ah comman's yo ter stop! [*The sounds cease abruptly. A figure appears—they step back. He never comes too near them.*] Don look at me an don come nea me. Now! What yo all pickin on Senon fo? What he done ter yo? What yo steal from him an hunt him lak he was a wil'cat? What fo yo drive him aroun an don gib him no place an no time ter sleep when he tired an his bones ache? He got his religion from his gran'-father an he got a right ter it. He black lak yo. Yo holy book don tell yo ter kill a man 'cause he don' sing an pray wid yo. Ah done warned yo once. Yo laks ter bury people don yo? Always diggin graves! So befo ah tells yo de message ah got ter go an cover up mah grave 'cause ah ain't goin dea no mo—yo didn't bury me right anyway—jes' dug a hole an throwed me in. Now yo got ter fix me up a new one—dis hea am a good place. [*He tramps around in a circle then stamps the ground with his feet as if covering up his grave. Shouting in time.*] Damn dis earth dat always take eberythin away! It done took away de bes' from me; it done took me away when ah was young—done took me away from mah mother an father an dragged me in. Oh ain't

it cold in dea! Oh ain't it black in dea! But ah got ter go back. Yo got ter bury me again—bury me not lak yo do trash—yo got ter sing me ter sleep. Yo got ter do it befo yo heas de word ob de Lawd. Get yo spades an dig me a new bed 'cause ah's sleepy an tired. Dig right dea—get yo goin—ah can't wait fo yo.

[Mechanically the men get their picks and shovels and begin digging into the ground.]

WALTER

Yo women folks—sing me a song—sweet an low so's ah can get ter sleep quick. Don come nea me or ah's goin ter drag yo in wid me. Not too deep cause ah wants ter hea yo singing or maybe on Saturday night ah invites yo all ter come an do a ring-shout roun' mah grave. *[He keeps on moving about.]* Dat deep enough. Now start de singing. *[The women comply but their voices can barely be heard.]* Now ah goes in ter de grave ter see——

[With a sudden cry and a rush DEBORAH is beside him.]

DEBORAH

Walthaw! Mah son!

WALTER

Don, woman! Yo goin ter die now! Keep away!

[With a terrific cry of fear the people rush off stage. DEBORAH embraces WALTER who is struggling to get away. She is pressing him to her bosom—crying, gasping.]

DEBORAH

Speak ter me, Walthaw! Ah ain't afeard ter die—jes' speak ter me!

[He tears himself away from her and hides his face. DEBORAH stands looking at him for a few seconds—her body is trembling—her arms are outstretched towards him. She pulls his hands away from his face—gently—and looks into his face for a long time. Suddenly with an inhuman cry she bends him to the ground and with terrible strength holds the writhing struggling body down.]

SENON

Yes dat's me, Deborah—dat's me—Senon. Ah gibs up.

DEBORAH

Ah knows it now. Ah knows it! Ah sees yo now,

yo damn black debil! Ah sees yo! Thought yo was goin ter play it on us?

SENON

'Cause ah done lobed him—'cause ah done lobed him ah done dat! What dey killed him fo? What yo gib him away fo an yo didn't eben bury him right. But ah pays dem fo dat. Ah done started dat fiah—ah did! Didn' ah tell yo ah would! But ah done fixed it so it didn' touch yo house—it done wen' round, it did—let me go now—ah sabel yo!

DEBORAH

[*Brutally—deliberately.*]

'Cause ob yo dey killed mah son—'cause ob yo dey done judged me an yo made dis hea place a mess ob ruins, now ah gibs yo up ter de han ob de Lawd Almighty!

SENON

[*Struggling, crying, tearing.*]

Don'! Ah does eberythin yo want me! Ah kills mahself. But don gib me up ter His han'!

[*She drags him to the cross.*]

DEBORAH

Oh Lawd Almighty, ah gibs yo dis heathen as ah done promised ah would! Ah gibs him ter yo in

'change fo mah son. Hea ah got him! Take him an gib me back mah son or gib me what ah done ask yo fo in de beginnin! Hea he is—take him! He is yo's—he belong ter yo now. [*Her fingers are on his throat—he falls limply to the ground.*] Has yo 'cepted de 'change? [*A ray of moonlight strikes the top of the cross. Exultantly.*] Glory Hallelujah! De Lawd done took de 'change! Blessed be de Lawd! [*Falls to her knees.*] King ob Kings! Lawd ob Lawds!

THE CURTAINS CLOSE.

SCENE SIX

Same setting. BROTHER ELIJAH *is standing near the mountain; ABNER is a few feet away from him.*

BROTHER ELIJAH

What you see, Abner? [*Pause.*] You see somethin, Abner? Den does yo hear somethin? Ain't Deborah hea?

ABNER

[*Haltingly.*]

Don see . . . don hear . . . nothin.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Don yo see Walthaw? Look good . . . look . . .

ABNER

Ah don see him . . . ah don see nothing . . .

BROTHER ELIJAH

Dey gone away—whea dey gone ter? Dea am somethin wrong hea, Abner . . . ah feels dat in mah

bones. [*Suddenly.*] Abner—feel de groun' an fin' out whea her tracks lead onto. Fin' dat woman an fin' out whea dat message. Don wait! Den come back hea an gib me de news. [*ABNER goes off.*] Ah can feel de air an de groun' an eberythin tremblin . . . somethin been don dat shouldn't been done . . . somebody done it . . . goin ter fin' out who done it. . . . [*Shouts.*] Come on hea—don be ascared . . . Brudder Elijah jes hea—everybody else ain't hea! [*One by one the people reappear and move slowly towards BROTHER ELIJAH and, forming a tableau, look at him, questioning hopefully and yet without hope.*] Yo all say nothin but ah knows what yo is thinkin . . . yo sees somethin dat ain't right hea . . . ah done sent Abner ter fin' out what happen an ter bring de message back. Dat all we can do now. Dat all! [*Tearfully.*] 'Cause if we turns ter de West—what am ter de West? If we turns ter de South—what am ter de South? Ter de right we sees no road open an from de left we hears no answer. We stands still. No use stampin de groun— . . . no use raisin voices ter heaben no mo. We ain't loud enough or nobody care ter listen ter us. [*Almost in a whisper—fearfully.*] Maybe we gets somebody dats goin ter listen ter us!

MATTHIAS

[*Uncertain.*]

He—he always done listen ter our troubles . . .

BARNABAS AND MOSES

Who?

MATTHIAS

SENON! [*A gasp from all . . . then a movement as if to attack the speaker . . . then silence.*]

Senon he see us . . . we see him . . . he hear us and we hear him . . . he help us get back de things dat done been burned up.

BARNABAS

If Abner bring back no message what we do den?

BROTHER ELIJAH

Abner's family done bring us too much trouble already.

VOICES

Sho has! Sho right! Hea he come.

[*Movement towards ABNER, who comes on slowly and pantomimes that he has nothing for them. They step away from him and look at BROTHER ELIJAH.*]

SERA

[*In a low tone.*]

Abner says nothin, Brudder Elijah.

BROTHER ELIJAH

Ah knows! [*Long pause, then with sudden fury he motions to the men, who carry ABNER to a tree and bind him to it.*] We done been cheated—we done been burned an cheated. Too much trouble yo Lawd done gib us. Dea ain't nothin more ter wait fo—de day am short, de night ovah an death waitin 'roun' de conah. But now *we* does somethin. . . . WE IS GOIN TER HAB A NEW BAPTISM AN A BIG FEAST!

VOICES

A new baptism an a big feast!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Yo woman folks—yo knows whea de vestments ob Senon am hidden—go get dem now! [*The women rush off shouting.*] Yo men go out an steal! Rob! Burn! Don let nothin stop yo! Bring back lots for de big feast! [*The men go off in various directions.*] Is yo ready ter die, Abner?

ABNER

Mah soul am in de keepin ob de Lawd—ah don

wan' nothin only his mussey—bin' me tight as yo want—ah still am wid de Lawd!

BROTHER ELIJAH

An if we takes yo ter hell?

ABNER

Ah neber changes—ah neber brings down mah cross—ah don stamp an tear at it no mattah what happen—lak yo done. Ah stays de serbant ob de Lawd forebah!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Not fo long. Bring yo son hea an let him gib us de message. Den we puts up de cross an prays an sings again. If yo don, yo goes his way!

ABNER

Ah got de protection ob de Lawd!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Yo ain't afeard ob Senon?

ABNER

Ob no man!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Senon stan up 'gainst de Lawd, he so strong!

ABNER

Don frighten me none. Sing an pray to de Lawd,
Brudder Elijah, an sabe yo'self.

BROTHER ELIJAH

What fo ah wants ter sing now? Who ah got
ter sing ter now? 'Ceptin ter de las' breath—ter de
las' breath ob life!

[Suddenly.]

Steal! Rob! Don wait! Let nothin hold yo
back! Bring it hea! We goin ter hab a feas' ter-
night! Dea is goin' ter be a new baptism ternight!

ABNER

Dea is goin ter be another judgment close soon!

BROTHER ELIJAH

From de mouf ob Senon come flames an smoke—
his eyes can see in de dark. His songs put debils ter
run—go get de message from yo son an Senon nebah
touch yo!

ABNER

De might ob de Lawd am stronger dan all de
Senons!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Yo starbes den—dea goin ter be a feas' hea ter-
night but yo starbes!

ABNER

Yo starbes too, Brudder, an all ob yo!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Dea dey come bringing lots ter eat!

ABNER

Dey brings nothin——

BROTHER ELIJAH

How yo know?

ABNER

'Cause yo done put de Lawd away!

[MOSES *appears.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

What yo got dea?

MOSES

Couldn' fin' nothin.

ABNER

[*Triumphantly.*]

De Lawd am mighty!

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*To ABNER.*]

De res' brings somethin an yo gets de flavoh if dea is a win'! Dat all yo gets!

ABNER

Dey brings nothin. [*The rest are streaming in. They are all costumed and carry sound making instruments such as small drums, rattles, knockers, etc.*]

[*They dress BROTHER ELIJAH and give him a small drum.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

What yo all brought?

[*Silence—long pause.*]

BARNABAS

Eberythin dead. Nothin left—'cept Deborah's place——

ABNER

An dea am light—fo she done foun' salbation.

[*Long pause. BROTHER ELIJAH strikes his tom-tom and they group themselves around the altar.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

Nothin! Took eberythin away! Tear down dat cross! What am de white man's Gawd?

[*The cross is taken down. They start the sound-making and finish when BROTHER ELIJAH raises his hands high in the air.*] What he done gib us? [*The same repeated—the voices joining in an angry shout.*] Whea am dis judgment day? [*Repetition with a hoarse laugh.*] What he done gib de black man? Is we any worse dan Deborah? What fo he done burned up eberythin dat belong ter us an lef' her dat house? Whea am de message he sen' us? [*Raises his voice.*] Senon am black lak us—he got powah—he know eberythin—he speak ter us plain—he kind ter us—once mo Abner call 'pon yo Lawd ter gib us de message. [*Pause.*] We leabes dis Lawd an goes ovah ter Senon! [*He strikes upon his tom-tom and immediately there is a whirling mass about the altar—words are indistinguishable. Cries, gestures, terrific sounds. Then they are on the ground, mumbling, hissing.*] Senon! De time am come fo yo ter 'cept us! Senon—mighty an strong come hea now an take ovah my comman! Whea is yo, Senon? We is yo frien's now! [*Long pause. Beats upon the tom-tom.*] We is waitin fo yo ter

baptize us once mo! [*Pause.*] Yo can hea us, Senon, yo ain't far away! [*Pounds upon the tom-tom again.*] We done looked fo yo all along. Has yo done lef' us when we needs yo mos'?

ALL

[*Chanting.*]

Senon! Senon! Senon!

ABNER

Dea ain't no use yo lookin fo him—dis am de valley ob de shaddah ob death. Go on an look fo him—yo finds him in de bushes dead. Yo finds him dea! [*A cry from all and then deep silence.*] De might ob de Lawd am powerful. Nothin so strong as Him. He touch, He protec' eberybody. We goes befo' Him—nothin stop in His way—mah son go—Senon go—soon all go. Look at de house ob Deborah—she done foun' salbation in de Lawd—her house am holy—it been sabed by de Lawd—ah ain't fit ter come inter it. She got what she done prayed fo—grass grow 'bout her house—de corn sproutin—she got a cow—de light ob de Lawd am her light—it fill up ebery corner ob de house. Dea am salbation—dea! Go dea an yo fin's de message from de Lawd. Don ask fo it. Jes see de light as ah see it. As Deborah

see it. Senon dead! De light am life! De Lawd
am light!

[He kneels and prays. BROTHER ELIJAH follows him and then one by one the rest emulate them. The prayer grows louder and culminates as the cross is raised and put back in its former place just as the curtains close.]

SCENE SEVEN

The stage is set as in Scene Two, with the addition of a large enclosure—R.—large enough for an animal. Within the enclosure there are husks of corn suspended from above; clean straw on the floor; a bright shawl covers one side of the frame.

Light: The stage is filled with a bright orange light—so thick that the “texture” seems organic.

ABNER is standing L.—silent, statuesque, servile. DEBORAH, dressed in white, her features and body radiant, is watching the enclosure. Voices from the vicinity of the house.

PETER'S VOICE

De work ob de Lawd's own han's.

EBENEZER

De only house sabed!

DINA

An Senon dead!

MARY

She got dat cow—long she prayed fo it.

SUZANNA

Whea dat cow come from?

MOSES

No one know.

BROTHER ELIJAH

[*Quickly.*]

Dat am de Lawd's own cow—de Lawd am mighty an powerful.

DEBORAH

De mighty han' ob de Lawd! [*She hangs a lantern in the enclosure.*] Abner—yo fix up de bed good an sof'?

ABNER

Yes—made it as sof' as mah own bed.

DEBORAH

[*Chanting.*]

His han's am de mightiest in de world—it's His han' all de time dat's doin eberythin kin' an mussiful down hea.

THE VOICES

Amen!

ABNER

[*Dreamily.*]

Whose han'?

DEBORAH

De same han's what move de stars an moon—de same dat took Walthaw away—an Senon—His! De Lawd's! Has yo fo'gotten de Lawd? Has yo become a heathen so sudden, Abner?

ABNER

[*Bitterly.*]

Ah nevah fo'gets de Lawd, lak——

DEBORAH

[*Turns away from him.*]

Yo means me? Stop dis! Stop it! Yo lies! Yo knows yo lies! Yo made it up in yo own min'! Ah nevah fo'get mah Lawd—nevah! Dey—trash—hangin 'roun mah house waitin fo bread an salvation—dey fo'get de Lawd [*Close to him—whispers.*] But don yo see de Lawd fo'giben me—he took Walthaw but he done spared me dis house an burned up all de res' an didn' he sen' me dis hea cow?

ABNER

How yo know dis hea cow belong ter yo?

DEBORAH

'Cause ah done made mah 'change wid de Lawd! Ah gib Him—ah gib Him somethin an He gabe me somethin—somethin ah done ask for an it don belong ter nobody else. She done come ter mah door, ain't she? Do anybody say it belong ter dem? Dey ain't no law but de Lawd's law an 'cordin ter it she's mine. She ain't no common cow—yo can see if yo ain't blin'! She don look lak a plain cow—don eat lak one. She ain't. [*Dreaming.*] She goin ter hab a calf soon. Ah sells de calf, buys a new Bible an fixes de roof. Yes—de Lawd take care ob me now! [*Goes to the enclosure and straightens out the bedding.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

Oh Lawd beat down 'pon us—beat down!

EBENEZER

Woman ob de Lawd, gib us salbation!

MOSES

Woman ob de Lawd, baptize us once mo!

NAOMI

Gib us somethin ter eat!

DEBORAH

De salbation am ter come to yo all soon——

MARY AND BARNABAS

When?

DEBORAH

When ah gets de word from de Lawd. Ah's waitin
—yo all got ter wait, too.

DINA

Gib us somethin ter eat.

MATTHIAS

We is thirsty.

SERA

We is hungry.

DEBORAH

[Maliciously.]

Dea am bread an such fo dose de Lawd chooses
an dea am nothin fo de sinnahs.

ABNER

Gib dem somethin ter eat—dey is yo brudders an
sistahs.

DEBORAH

Ah neber goes agains' de Lawd. Dat am his punishment fo dem. Dey stays hungry an thirsty till de Lawd speak an say "Help dem."

PETER

It am dark an damp in dese bushes—let us come in de house.

ABNER

Let dem come in de house—dey is sore stricken—foller de teachin ob de Holy Book.

DEBORAH

[With an air of finality.]

De word ob de Lawd ain't come yet.

[An angry shout comes from THE VOICES.

Bodies moving in the bushes and women's voices singing in low and dolorous tones.]

ABNER

What dat noise? Who movin? Who singin?

DEBORAH

What ah care? Who ah got ter be afeard ob now? Ah stands beside de Lawd an His mighty han' protec' me. No trash body tech me!

ABNER

Ah don know de workins ob de Lawd's mind an it ain't fo me ter ask what am His doin an am man's but ah don see His han' workin in dis—[*Pause.*] Ah uses mah thinkin an says de fiah was eberywhere but not aroun our place . . . de cow jes naterally come hea lookin fo a safe place and now you says dat——

DEBORAH

De road am short fo you maybe, Abner, an you wants ter be smitten an driven off dis earth an so you doubts an talks lak dat. De wicked am estranged from de womb, dey goes on de wrong road as soon as dey is born—speak lies, dere tongues am lak de poison ob de serpent. Dey damned by de Lawd an' men. Look an see what happen ter dem——

[*PETER runs in.*]

PETER

Deborah—ah hears noise by de marshes an ah runs dea—ah sees yo cow dancin roun' lak a goat. Sudden she jump up an go right deep in—pas' de Ridge Road. She got stuck dea all right an is waitin ah supposes for yo ter come an pull her out.

[*Pause.*]

DEBORAH

[*Stunned.*]
Dat couldn' be mah cow——

PETER

Why not?

DEBORAH

[*In a shaky voice.*]
'Cause dat am de Lawd's own cow.
[*The orange light begins to fade.*]

PETER

Hurry, Abner—de marshes won' wait fo yo.
[*ABNER and PETER go out. DEBORAH stands rooted to one spot for some time. Suddenly flings herself on her knees.*]

DEBORAH

Oh Lord forgib me mah sins—ah hab sinned but don smite me too hard—les'—les'—[*long pause.*]
No! No! Fo'gib de thoughts ah jes had in mah min'—fo'gib me but dat is all ah got—it means so much ter me—yo done gib it ter me don take it away now. [*Relieved, gets up—goes to the door—peers at the sky—reënters. With a beatific air about her*

she paces from one end of the room to the other chanting.] All mah life ah read yo Holy Book—done trusted an beliebed in it. Dem am yo words! Mussiful Lawd! Kin' Lawd! De world am yours an all dat am in it! King ob Kings—father ob all an eberythin! [ABNER *appears in the shed—his head bowed. She sees him and moves to the other side of the room.*] If—if dat cow am sunk in de marshes ah's goin ter— [ABNER *comes in—goes over to her and speaks in a quiet tone as if telling a biblical tale to a child.*]

ABNER

Deborah—once 'pon a time a man an his woman done sinned 'gains' de Lawd. De great Lawd He done took eberythin away from dem fo He nebah barter wid sinnahs. Bad it was fo dem an dey thanked de Lawd fo givin' dem life. De Lawd heard dat an He fo'gabe dem an sent dem a lot ob gif's. Dey 'cepted dem an sang de Lawd's praises. But one day He wanted ter fin' out what was in deir hearts an He once mo took eberythin away—*eberythin* He gabe dem but dey knowed it was de doin ob Him who am always righteous an so dey kep' on prayin till de Lawd took dem ter heaben fo He knew deir hearts was pure! [*Pause.*] Now He done chose ter try yo.

He done took away what He gabe yo—de cow am sunk in de marshes. Let dat be a sacrifice ter him fo our sins an let's wait now fo our day—fo de day He'll call us ter Him! Amen!

DEBORAH

Abner—has yo become a heathen dat yo wants ter sacrifice a animal ter de Lawd? Whea do de Bible speak ob sacrifices ter Him? Am He a heathen gawd lak Senon's? or a Christian Gawd? What he want a cow fo? Do he want milk? Meat? Is ah a chile he play wid me lak dat? [*Turns her anger directly to God.*] Ain't dea no reason in yo? Ain't dea no kindness? Whea am yo eyes? Yo ears? Whea am yo heabenly justice? What fo yo hide it? But yo won' answer 'cause yo knows yo's guilty! Wasn' dat a bargain yo made wid me? Yo keeps Walthaw an Senon an gibs me nothin! [*In the shed are the people with BROTHER ELIJAH at their head, moving towards her like the proverbial army with banners.*] How ah goin ter lib now? Why yo don take me too? Why don yo get yo'self a Gawd so yo can answer 'afore Him? Yo escapes punishment 'cause yo got nobody ter punish yo. Get yo'self a Gawd dat am stronger dan yo an see how many sins yo done! But now ah's got ter go an settle mattahs wid yo if it

take me de res' ob mah days an set me in hell in de end! [*Makes a move as if she were going out when there is a roll of thunder. All fall on their knees except DEBORAH.*] Yo can't frighten me! Ah's comin as sho as yo is whea yo is! [BROTHER ELIJAH and his followers raise themselves and are at the door, barring her exit. Pounding away at them.] Lemme go through! Ah's goin ter de marshes if dat's de way ter His chair or ter hell—ah's goin dea! Open yo gates! Open yo gates!

[*The arms of the assembly are in the air—their fists clenched.*]

BROTHER ELIJAH

De time am come! [*Their fists fall upon her like sledge hammers crushing her to the ground.*]

DEBORAH AND BROTHER ELIJAH

Open yo gates! [DEBORAH.]

De time am come! [BROTHER ELIJAH.]

ALL

De time am come! De time am come!

ABNER

Mussey fo her, Oh Lawd! Hab mussey on her!

BROTHER ELIJAH

Glory ter de Lawd—King ob Kings—Mastah ob
all an eberythin! Dy will am done! Am done!
Glory ter de Lawd—Judge ob Judges!

BROTHER ELIJAH AND ALL

Lawd ob Lawds—King ob Kings——

*[Long pause—the group breaks up. A few of
the women give way to tears and sobs. One
man falls on his knees.]*

BROTHER ELIJAH

Deborah, yo lips an yo breath am sealed forebah
now, but we got ter stan' judgment again 'cause ob
yo. . . . Oh . . . oh . . . now de earth am goin
ter covah yo up. . . . Us has got ter wait an
wait. . . .

*[He begins to wheel about helplessly, groaning,
and stamping with his feet. And the
spirituel, sung at first by Brother Elijah and
taken up by the rest, seems to come as if from
voices far off . . . as if from the earth
itself. . . .]*

Covah us up

Oh covah us up,

Our eyes am shut
Oh, covah us up!

De waters am deep
Oh, covah us up,
Dea's a leaf ovah our eyes
Oh, covah us up!

De clouds am thick,
De clouds am high,
Oh, covah us up,
Oh, covah us up!

What's undah our feet,
What's ovah our head,
Covah us up,
Oh, covah us up!

For music to this spirituel, see page 121.

THE CURTAINS CLOSE SLOWLY.

COUNT YO' DAYS

Moderato Unison

Count yo' days,... Count yo' days....

The first system of music is written for a unison voice part. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in the key of D major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The melody is simple and rhythmic, with lyrics "Count yo' days,... Count yo' days...." written below the notes.

Count yo' days, sin-nin sis - tah, Count yo' days..

The second system of music continues the melody. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in the key of D major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The melody is simple and rhythmic, with lyrics "Count yo' days, sin-nin sis - tah, Count yo' days.." written below the notes.

Count yo days.. Put 'em in a sack....

The third system of music concludes the piece. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in the key of D major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The melody is simple and rhythmic, with lyrics "Count yo days.. Put 'em in a sack...." written below the notes.

Put 'em in a sack... Count yo'

The first system of music features a treble and bass staff in G major (one sharp). The melody in the treble staff begins with a quarter rest, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass staff provides a steady accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

days, sin-nin' sis - tah, Count yo' days,.. Count yo' days..

The second system continues the melody and accompaniment. The treble staff has a more active line with many eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass staff continues with a consistent rhythmic pattern.

De sack got holes... De sack got holes...

The third system concludes the piece. The melody in the treble staff has a final flourish. The bass staff ends with a sustained note and a final chord.

Count yo' days, sin-nin' sis - tah, Count yo days,...

The first system of music consists of a treble and bass staff. The treble staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. It contains a melody of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass staff begins with a bass clef, the same key signature, and contains a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

Count yo' days,... De sack am full o' holes,

The second system of music continues the melody and bass line from the first system. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

De sack am full o' holes, Count yo

The third system of music concludes the piece. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

A musical score for a song titled 'EARTH'. The score is written on two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bottom staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody in the top staff consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some beamed sixteenth notes. The lyrics 'days, sin - nin sis - tah, Count yo' days, Count yo' days...' are written below the top staff. The accompaniment in the bottom staff consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some beamed sixteenth notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

days, sin - nin sis - tah, Count yo' days, Count yo' days...

D. C. and repeat ad. lib.

COVAH US UP

Moderato p

Cov - ah us up, Oh, cov - ah us up, Our

eyes am shut, Oh, cov - ah us up. De wa-tah am

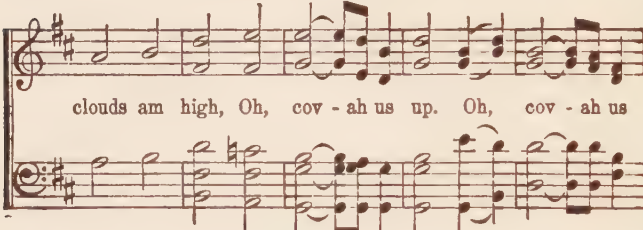
deep, Oh, cov - ah us up, Deres a leaf o - vah our

f Unison



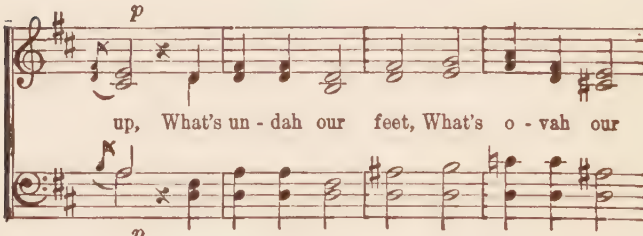
eyes, Oh, cov - ah us up. De clouds am thick, De

f Unison



clouds am high, Oh, cov - ah us up. Oh, cov - ah us

p



up, What's un - dah our feet, What's o - vah our

p



heads, Cov - ah us up, Oh, cov - ah us up.



